

MOTOR THEFT CROPS GROW ENORMOUSLY

Source of Lawless Wealth
Rivals Bootlegging in
Rich Productivity.

DRASTIC LAW NEEDED

Insurance Officials Ask
Legislature to Help End
Their Vast Losses.

POLICE AGAIN REWARDED

Number of Cars Stolen in the
State This Year Likely
to Be About 10,000.

As a medium of accumulating lawless wealth rapidly, bootlegging is said to have rendered all others impotent. But, if the statistics are to be relied upon, the motor car thieves and their accomplices have captured second position. This is not an attempt at facetiousness. It is a boiling down to a sentence or two the consensus of insurance people.

The State Police have been ordered to stop bootlegging within the boundaries of this Commonwealth. The measure of success they have achieved is not a matter of discussion here. But, having compared figures and viewed with alarm the coming year's possibilities, the New York State Conference of Mayors is preparing to go before the next session of the Legislature and demand that it pass some sort of legislation that will have influence over the thriving mobs who are devoting themselves to the theft of motor cars.

This particular review of the situation has to do with New York city. Just how many automobiles have been stolen throughout this State since Jan. 1 can only be surmised. The figures are not yet available. Last year, however, the State suffered more than 7,000 such crimes. And now it is all too clear that the number probably will reach 10,000 this year.

And thus far this year, nearly 4,200 motors have been stolen in New York city alone.

Radical Action Is Needed.

A few days ago William P. Capes, secretary of the New York State Conference of Mayors, told THE NEW YORK HERALD that the Legislature must do something radical or else the insurance people are going to adopt a new schedule of rates and these rates are going to approach the prohibitive stage. Half a dozen insurance men, asked to confirm this year's business is getting better. These figures are, of course, for the entire State. The city comes in a moment. Among the folk who will agree (if they care to be frank) that this year was a more prosperous one than last, are those who devote themselves to the stealing of automobiles in New York city.

In a moment or so figures will be set forth explaining the situation. Much depends upon how you scan them. They might very well be used to everlastingly damn the Police Department, or you might construct therefrom an equally impressive defence of Commissioner Enright and his 12,000 men.

But no matter what you angle of observation may be, you will eventually become entangled in the inevitable maze of circumstances that will prompt you to hurl the said statistics into the waste paper basket and agree that a policeman's life is not a happy one.

Losses Exceed Retrievals.

Every so often the New York police notify the police of Newark, Jersey City, Yonkers, White Plains, Mount Vernon and other cities lying in what we call the metropolitan area, that such and such cars were stolen in New York city on such and such a date. Please to be on the look-out for such stolen property. And occasionally there will be addenda

to these lists to the effect that certain cars on specified lists may be stricken off. The inference of course is that such motors are present or accounted for. At any rate the cancellations are numerically so inferior that it is to be assumed that only a relatively few missing cars are retrieved.

Furthermore the cars comprising this list number among them motors that have been lost for the insurance money. In other words they have been done away with or were permitted to be stolen that the owner might collect from the insurance company issuing the policy on the car. Then there is the car actually stolen, but not properly reported by the owner, who decided that it would be unwise of him to tell the whole truth. Add to that the bona-fide case of theft where the owner has left his car unlocked and unguarded—in brief has done everything but place upon his car an invitation to thieves—and you have a few of the aforesaid circumstances that modify the importance of the statistics.

To begin with, the police of New York city had 4,148 motor car thefts reported to them between January 1 and November 20. That many cars were stolen within the boundaries of the city. That makes an average of about thirteen a day.

For a number of reasons, the most popular of which seems to be that they are looking forward to radical changes in the automobile section at Police Headquarters, the insurance men are not anxious to air their views. But for entirely different reasons they balk completely when asked to set a valuation upon the motor cars stolen in New York city since January 1.

Theft Crop Grows in Size.

During the first ten months of 1920 the reported thefts amounted to 2,745. Business boomed this year, you see. But the boom is realized more sternly when you consider that from January 1, 1920, to January 1, 1921, the police received just 3,540 notices from disgruntled motor owners. Therefore the thieves got as well with 618 more than last year's entire crop as early as November 20.

The office of the Secretary of State in Albany produces the information that 252,890 automobiles were licensed in New York city between January 1 and December 1. Those who would minimize any indictment of the police that might be suggested on account of the great number of thefts can at once point to the fact that, according to these figures, only one car in every seventy is stolen during the year.

But that doesn't appeal to the owner-victim. The insurance officials, who view the increase with alarm, are not impressed by this ratio. And the fact that the figures indicate that the motor thieves are growing bolder month by month should urge a unanimous concern.

While statistics are being considered the following table of monthly comparisons will show the increase in the number of cars stolen:

Small Cars Easier to Steal.

There are more Fords in service than any other make of automobile. It is much easier to dispose of a Ford. Owners of Fords are most liable to be careless with them. It is quite as easy to lock or otherwise safeguard a Ford as it is any other car, but somehow or other the owners seldom appreciate the fact until the car is gone. And then, too, any motor thief handy with tools can so change the numbers on a Ford parts that you wouldn't be able to identify your own car a day after you lost it.

It is a fact that the motor thieves specialize in certain makes. Before the Eighteenth Amendment was added to our Constitution the number of big, powerful touring cars stolen was comparatively small. Indeed, according to one insurance man, Fords comprised about three-quarters of all thefts. But with prohibition came rum-running and with rum-running came a fiercer banditry in the automobile world.

There may be some other reason or reasons for the leap in the number of Packards, Stutzes, Pierce Arrows, Cadillacs, Nationals and so on stolen in 1920 and 1921, but the insurance men have not found it. At least they say they haven't. It is utterly true, according to the police, that the rum runner and the motor riding bandit prefers the Packard, the Pierce Arrow, the Stutz and the Cadillac above other makes. They are fast and capacious. They are heavy enough to hold the road under extraordinary conditions.

Other cars can measure up to the same specifications to be sure, but one watching the streets, roads and curbs for a day or so can corroborate the police in their explanation that the above mentioned big cars are seen

offener and are therefore more available. But next to the Ford on the stolen motors list comes the Buick. Up until November 20 331 Buicks were reported stolen in New York city. And next on the list comes the Dodge. They got away with about 199 of them this year, not counting November and December. The answer is almost as simple to find as in the case of the Ford car. It is not difficult to dispose of a Buick; nor is it the most difficult thing in the world to obliterate the identity thereof. The same may be said of the Dodge.

Costly Cars Almost Immune.

And throughout the entire list a similar line of reasoning obtains. For example, you find that four Rolls Royces, four Packards, 71 Oldsmobiles, 48 Saabers, 44 Nationals, 63 Stutzes and 40 Chalmers. Thus we account for 3,488 of the 4,148 stolen motor cars. The remaining 660 are distributed over a field of nearly fifty makes of automobiles. The Lexington, for instance, has caught the fancy of the thief. Forty Lexingtons were reported stolen during the year.

The mightiest protest, of course, arises from the insurance companies. Several insurance men, asked for their opinion regarding the increase in the number of stolen automobiles, took the middle ground by saying that they had no reason to believe that the police are not as vigilant as circumstances make it possible for them to be, but that "something" will have to be done to prevent further increases.

These insurance people and that automobile insurance is almost as risky to them as any "bad risk" insurance they write. If, for example, a car is recovered by the police they pay the Police Department a reward for turning it over to them. If the car is not found they pay the amount guaranteed to the mourning loser of the car. In either case they lose money.

They have tried various means to lighten the burden all this places upon them. Last February, for various reasons suggested by the investigation of the New York Police Department by former Gov. Whitman, the insurance companies decided to discontinue paying such rewards to the police until after the latter had obtained the conviction of the person or persons who had stolen the recovered automobile. It was suggested at that time (but never proved) that automobiles might be stolen and then left where certain policemen could find them. The policeman would turn in the car. The reward was paid to the department. He got his share, and out of that he might have paid a certain amount to the man who stole the car and left it where he might find it—a place designated in advance, of course.

There was no clear proof that such a state of affairs existed. But the insurance people decided to pay no more rewards until after the thief was behind bars. One hundred and five insurance companies subscribed to this new arrangement. The result was that the number of convictions did not increase and that the thefts of automobiles kept on increasing steadily.

So a few weeks ago the same insurance officials got together again and decided to resume the old schedule of paying rewards upon the recovery of the car. They set forth their change of heart in a letter to the Automobile Underwriters' Detective Bureau, 140 Nassau street, an organization representing about three-quarters of the automobile insuring companies. It read:

"In regard to the agreement made with ex-Gov. Whitman that members of the detective bureau would pay no rewards for the recovery of stolen automobiles in New York city without the

arrest and conviction of the thief or thieves, we now wish to advise that Mr. Whitman has agreed to a modification of this arrangement.

"The practice to be observed in the future is that rewards and legitimate expenses, incurred by officers for the return of stolen automobiles where the thief has not been apprehended, and where extraordinary zeal and intelligence have been displayed by the officer, may be paid, subject to the approval of the Automobile Underwriters' Detective Bureau and by the Police Commissioner of New York, such rewards and expenses to be payable by the bureau through the Police Commissioner, as provided for in the New York charter."

Policeman Gets Half of Reward.

The rewards paid depend upon the value of the car, or upon the valuation set upon the car by the police. They range from \$25 to \$100 except in extraordinary cases. The minimum is paid for the recovery of cars valued at \$1,000; \$50 on \$2,000; \$75 on \$3,000; and \$100 on \$4,000. All rewards paid are turned over to the Police Commissioner, who, according to the rules, is supposed to deduct half of it for the Police Pension Fund and hand the rest to the cop who found the car.

While the insurance people deplore the increase in the thefts and insist that "something will have to be done about it," they do not say that the police are to blame. They do say that the automobile squad at Police Headquarters is so small as to be almost ineffective. It must be made larger, they say, and it should work in conditions that fetch it closer to the insurance companies or to the Automobile Underwriters' Detective Bureau.

With the recovery of business generally, one insurance man said, the number of thefts of automobiles increases. For instance, as was said at the beginning, this has been a better business year than last. Therefore more automobiles have been purchased; there are more to be stolen; there are a greater number of persons willing to buy; the market has expanded even for the thief. Early in 1920 and late in 1919 the business of stealing automobiles fell off simply because the thief was never sure of getting rid of his booty. One who had the cash and the nerve to buy had innumerable opportunities to make good bargains with legitimate owners.

The garages where used cars were for sale were so full that there was no room for more. Therefore the thief had to take the chance of selling on the fly. And then, too, the prospective purchaser of the used car could pick and choose. He did not have to take a chance of buying a motor that had been stolen and having that same car reclaimed by its rightful owner after he had paid the thief the latter's price.

"We shall ask the Legislature to enact laws which will assist the police departments of the various cities in apprehending automobile thieves and reducing the activities of that class of criminals generally," says Mr. Capes.

EDISON COMMENDS FORD 'SHOALS' PLAN

Fertilizer Project Would Employ Million Persons, He Says.

SEES FERTILIZER NEED

Explains Son's Invention of Wheel to Cut Barbed Wire Entanglements.

Thomas A. Edison, who returned last week from a trip to Muscle Shoals with Henry Ford, said at his home in Orange, N. J., yesterday that the Shoals was a first class business proposition and that Mr. Ford could operate a fertilizer plant there and make it go.

"He can not only make his rental," said Mr. Edison, "but a good profit for the people besides. Fertilizer is in great demand in the South, and the people need a cheap fertilizer. They can get fertilizer now, but the price is too high. They cannot afford to buy it. I cannot estimate the present waste from lack of fertilizer, but the crop would be doubled if the people had it, and employment would be given to about a million persons."

Mr. Edison would not comment much on the armament conference at Washington, but said that the 5-5-3 naval plan seems to be a good one, though he had not given it a great deal of thought. "I think, however," he said, "that we ought to keep up with our experiments with submarines and deadly gases and keep up with the other fellow. It would

be just as well to be prepared with our experiments. Then if some one starts an argument we would be ready. We would not have to stop to experiment."

It was Mr. Edison's son, Theodore, a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who has invented the wheel to cut through wire entanglements, of which Mr. Edison spoke in Detroit last week. The wheel, Mr. Edison explained, is three feet in diameter, one foot thick, run by a Ford automobile motor and gains a velocity of seven miles a minute.

"Some of the wheels," said Mr. Edison, "will contain T N T and others will be empty. When the device is started it runs in a straight line, and it is operated on the gyroscope principle.

"The first experiment was made near Morristown, and after that the wheel was taken to an island off Key West. We built barbed wire entanglements several feet apart for a distance of 100 feet. We also dug large holes, some before the barbed wire and some in between it. The wheel went right over the holes and through the wire, continuing about a mile. We also piled up brush and trees and the wheel cut right through them."

BOOKKEEPER MISSING; ALSO \$4,100 IN SAFE

Gulf Refining Co. Looking for Frederick McDonough.

A search was begun in Newark and this city yesterday for Frederick McDonough, bookkeeper for the Gulf Refining Company, who has disappeared with his wife and two children. Soon after McDonough's failure to appear in the company's office in Plume Point lane, Newark, yesterday morning, it was found that the safe had been opened and \$4,100 stolen. About \$3,000 of this was employees' savings, drawn from a Newark bank Saturday for distribution to-day. Inquiries at the McDonough home, at 211 South Eleventh street, proved his family had left the house. The police were notified and watch was placed on all steamship piers.

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Formerly \$75 to \$600

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(Fur-trimmed)
Formerly \$165 to \$650

Gowns and Dresses at 1/2 and 1/3 off
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Fur-trimmed Evening Wraps at 1/2 and 1/3 off
Formerly \$195 to \$2250

Handsome Costume Blouses at 1/2 and 1/3 off
Formerly \$35 to \$100

Street, Sport and Dress Hats at 1/2 and 1/3 off
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Sweater Coats	2.95 to 14.95
Dresses	1.95 to 12.95
Kimonoes	.69 to 25.00
Hammocks	15.95 to 25.00
Baby Baskets	.49 to 15.95
Baby Scales	10.95 to 22.50
Baby Cribs	5.95 to 148.00

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